

## FERACIALNALISATION IN TONI MORRISON'S THE BLUEST EYE AND MAHASHWETA DEVI'S RUDALI

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### ABSTRACT

Toni Morrison is a Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winner novelist, editor and Professor. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogues and richly detailed black characters. Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* is a depiction of incredibly difficult detailed life of a young Afro-American girl. On the other hand Mahasweta Devi Padma Sri, Padma Bhushan and Jnanpith Awardee, novelist, teacher and journalist. Her novels are dedicated to the cause of oppressed communities within India. Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* is the depiction of an Indian woman who becomes the victim of destiny. The present paper is an attempt to compare three literary theories i.e. Feminism, Racism and Marginalisation in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*.

It is observed that these three theories are applicable in the form of comparison from the point of two different female authors one being an Indian writer Mahasweta Devi and the other being an Afro- American writer Toni Morrison. The paper is thus a study of 'FERACIALNALISATION', a concept that is an assimilation of 'Fe' (Feminism), 'Racial' (Racism) and 'Nalisation' (Marginalisation) in these two works of art.

**KEYWORDS:** Feminism, Racism, Marginalisation

### INTRODUCTION

The present paper focuses on the three key concepts in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* that is feminism, racism and marginalisation. These three theories could be compared through the perspective of two female authors belonging to two different roots in terms of socio-political scenario; still their psychology remains the same. So the entire paper converse about the term 'Feracianalisation' a term which is an assimilation of these three literary theories in the two works of art; one by an Indian author and the other by an Afro-American author.

The reason for combining these theories is that women diverge in terms of how race, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability which affect their experiences, and other factors, such as historical context and geographical location that also serves to be a framework in the analysis of feminism. The two terms Race and Gender are inseparable and this is the reason one talks about black feminism, white feminism, and post-colonial feminism and so on. And it is clearly observed that when race and gender starts interacting in the complicated hierarchical structure of society women automatically become marginalised. Be it India or America the plight of women in terms of race and gender remains the same. This issue is very much evident in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

Toni Morrison is one of the most celebrated authors of the second half of twentieth century America who depict the consciousness of contemporary people entangled in the web of life. She describes in particular the consciousness of

Afro-Americans who had to bear affronts on various levels-physical, mental, psychological and more important than these is on racial level. Morrison is an author who has combined literary, aesthetics, moral and social, spiritual and psychological aspects in her narratives. She narrates what she has witnessed in the US as its citizen and also as a part of her ethnicity. The first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1933, Morrison has proved her love, ability and loyalty towards her writing and her people. Growing up in a black community she has witnessed and felt its problems, sufferings, pain, anguish, and the trauma that goes with all this. Morrison through her novels wants her readers to actively participate in her fictional world and face the reality in terms of women's sufferings. Listening to the varied experiences of her Afro-American ancestors, Morrison formed an attachment with her ethnicity, and with pride and enthusiasm celebrates that in her literary output. She celebrates her ethnicity's dreams-broken, unfulfilled and even deferred ones that provided them strength to fight against the Jim Crow America. She mingles the unrealistic constituents of her race with a realistic presentation of life and characters giving them authenticity in certain ways. Despite the fact that Morrison's school was integrated and that she was the best student in her class, Morrison experienced the effects of racism early in her age. She herself was a victim of racism; marginalisation and patriarchal family and a combination of all these three effects are felt in her novel *The Bluest Eye*.

Mahasweta Devi, the most distinguished social activists among the contemporary Bengali literary artists, took up her pen to expose and explode the sham and fraudulence of the democratic setup in our country and to represent the fates of marginalised women undergoing untold nurseries within and without their own communities. Mahasweta Devi's intention in her writings is to excavate and exhibit the gender causes lying underneath the socio-political and economic exploitation of women belonging to minority rather who are so called marginalised. The writer reveals the virtual slave trade that fosters under the facade of the democratic society of India, and clearly indicates the plight of the women who usually have no one to turn to, nothing to look forward to, and have only a few to lend them a voice-women who are regarded as sub-human and treated as commodities. She talks about the caste system and social hierarchical system in India, encompassing the concept of 'Feracianalisation.'

On one hand Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* reflects how the society has affected the Afro-American minorities only because they are not white, thin, male, young Christian and financially secure. As she says,

'They lived there because they were poor and black, and they

stayed there because they believed they were ugly. Although

their poverty was traditional and stultifying, it was not unique.

But their ugliness was unique.'

(TBE, 36)

Toni Morrison believes that survival of black woman in a white racist society greatly depends upon their emphasis on loving their own race, their own culture and loving themselves and not on engrossing themselves in white culture or white beauty standards. These words clearly speak of the way the afro-Americans became a victim of racism and were marginalised in American society. In resistance to this marginalisation the theory of Black Feminism was forged. Moreover, if Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is viewed from the perspective of Black Feminism, it is an attempt to reflect the powerlessness, inhumanity and pains that women of colour went through. It can thus be said that Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is a story woven around the concepts of Feminism, Racism and Marginalisation. On the other hand, Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* is a tale about the struggle of impoverished and the environment of denial in which they live in. Mahasweta

Devi in *Rudali* takes death as a metaphor to show the class struggle and predicament of the oppressed. Spivak in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" makes a valid comment; 'The subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow than subaltern men.'

Mahasweta Devi, in her book, documents the economic, social and religious oppression experienced by Dalit women. The text of *Rudali* glorifies the death of the feudal lords to establish their caste supremacy and other social issues like poverty, sexual abuse, prostitution, old age, marginalisation and patriarchy as the alarming problems in the emancipation of women. Thus the entire text of *Rudali* includes feminism, racism and marginalisation as key issues in the contemporary Indian society.

This paper deals with feminism as one of the key concept that is both a political stance and a theory that focuses on gender as a subject of analysis when reading cultural practices and as a platform to demand equality, rights and justice. Black feminism is a prominent issue in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Black feminism emerged because of a convincing argument: 'The black woman's oppression was the result of a double bind of being woman and being black.'

Black feminism was oppositional to both patriarchy as well as white feminism. Lisa William says that in her first novel 'The Bluest Eyes' Toni Morrison narrates the story of eleven years old girl Pecola Breedlove who is silenced and destroyed by her own 'internalised self hatred' she hates her darkness and longs for white skin and blue eyes. She believes that white features would help her gain entry to all that has excluded her. Morrison serves to be the mouth piece of Pecola who believes that if she gains blue eyes she will be accepted in the society as well as by her family members who doesn't accept her because she is black as it is well said,

"It had occurred to Pecola some time ago, that if her eyes, those  
 Eyes that held the pictures and knew the sights-if those eyes of  
 Her were different, that is to say beautiful, she herself would be  
 Different."

(TBE, 46)

As Barbara Christian stated in this regard comments that 'The beauty searched for in the book is not just the possession of blue eyes, but the harmony that they symbolise.'

In *The Bluest Eye* Pecola shares a room with her brother and lives with her disabled mother and drunkard father. She is raped by her father and resultantly becomes pregnant. Her rape by her alcoholic father symbolises the most prominent type of sexual assault against Black females by black males and finally Pecola in search of white beauty standards goes mad and ultimately is left with an identity crisis as both the worlds sexually assaulted her. An identity crisis is also felt in the life of Sanichari when she realised that she always lived for others. Initially living to the expectations of father, after marriage fulfilling the demands of husband and after his death earning bread for son. In all this process she lost her childhood, her youth and now when she is middle aged she searches where she belongs.

In both the works of art, that is, Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*, one finds both the protagonists have to suffer in their life not only in the external world but also in their homes. Pecola was disliked by her parents and was physically harassed by her own father. In the same manner even Sanichari is tortured by her mother-in-law as she got married at an early age and was taught never to give reply to her in laws.

The elements of feminism can also be observed in terms of prostitution which is applicable for women race and

gender. In Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* one comes to know that the three women China, Poland and Marie are prostitutes who live in MacTeer family in one part of the house and teaches Pecola how to tempt males because in this way they would be able to survive among the white people and society. The same aspect is portrayed in *Rudali* where the women are forcibly been converted into whores by the malik-mahajans and they ready to serve them for the sake of their own survival;

'Cheap whores, selling themselves for a few annas, all old now. Its hard  
Life. They still have to stand around; eyes lined with kohl,lamps in their  
Hands. They'll come as soon as they know the old man's dead.' (R, 105)

Where Black Feminism is a concerned area of study, racism tends to creep in automatically and so is the case with Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes*. It is observed that Cholly and Pecola are affected by racism in their childhoods; they later fail to express themselves and become racist oppressors. Cholly has been a victim of racism and emotional abuse since his childhood; it makes him someone who cannot show love or express his feelings. He suffers from racism when he is caught having sex with his friend Darlena. Two white men catch him in the act and scream,

Get on wid it, nigger," said the flashlight one.

'Sir?' said cholly, trying to find a buttonhole.

'i said, get on wid it. An' make it good, nigger, make it good.'

(TBE, 146)

He in turn responds to their command and actually rapes her. Lorde explain this act as anger by defining rape as "not aggressive sexuality but sexualised aggression." Cholly's daughter Pecola is also a victim of racist society in which she lives. Pecola's desire to fit in the mythical room is shown by which friend she choose to talk with and it was shown that she develops a liking towards Sherley Temple; a girl with blue eyes and white skin. The white male from the corner store looks at her with distaste, maybe because of her blackness and her ugliness. Pecola is a victim of her ultimate goal to be a pretty, white, blue eyed child. The line between colour and nigger was thus always an important issue to ponder upon. Societies always remain divided on racial, communal and linguistic lines. In America, the blacks are victimised and in India casteism has kept people eternally divided. The tribal's and the scheduled castes who belong to the bottom of India's caste hierarchy, along with other depressed communities remain the focal point of Mahasweta Devi's writing *Rudali*, a custom of professional mourning prevalent among the lower caste women of rural Rajasthan for the deceased males of upper caste, is a culture which can be regarded as a site of contestation where gender, class, caste and economic status are intertwined. The tears are thus purchased. The complexity of this issue of exploitation of private emotions and turning those into saleable commodities has been poignantly handled by Mahasweta Devi. She has beautifully handled the portrayal of minority community in Tahad village, the Ganjus and Dushads. Exploitation goes to such an extent that a child Budhua is turned to a bonded labour. Sanichari takes a loan of fifty rupees from Mahajan Ramavtar and as a result she had to face economic oppression. The entire community of Ganjus knew that if any women go to the Mahajans to work they turn to whores and never come back. Thus it is observed that if racism is very prominently seen in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, then differences on the basis of caste and ethnicity is seen in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*.

Toni Morrison discusses slavery as an important issue in her text and discussed about the condition of afro-Americans in USA. Since in most situation African Americans did not possess an equal status, they always had a feeling of

being excluded and separated while fighting for equality. The suffering of female slaves is twofold in *The Bluest Eye*. Not only has their skin colour pushed them towards margin, but also their gender causes them being doubly marginalised. On the other hand Mahasweta Devi very carefully and diligently echoes her inner urge that the malady of untouchability should be abolished from the society. *Rudali* is linked with many social movements which question about the bonded labour, leading feudalism in rural society, state negligence and forceful acquirement of agricultural land. *Rudali* is thus clear in portrayal of the underpowered Sanichari's emergence as a woman who is vital to the lives of the Malik Mahajans, the exploitative land owners; capitalising on the suggestion laid by Dulan she becomes a Rudali, a professional mourner for the rich. Thus caste and poverty margined her from rest of the society and she fell a victim of marginalised oppression.

## CONCLUSIONS

The present paper is an attempt to understand the literature of two marginalised groups, Afro-Americans in USA and Dalits in India. It shows how two disparate societies, USA and India are constituted by comparable hegemonic social economical cultural and political structures of oppression that define and delimit the identities of the subaltern in the respective societies. The superstructure of race in USA and caste in India inform, deform and complicate the identities of the marginalised along the lines of gender, class and family structure. While Afro-American women, children and men negotiate their national identities in USA, Dalits attempt to realise their national identities guaranteed by their Indian constitution. While historically emasculated subaltern men may vent and represent their rightful frustration and wrought against the oppressors, they may be simultaneously silencing their own doubly oppressed women. Thus by analysing the works of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* the concept of 'Feracialnalisation' marks its strong presence in the literary arena.

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